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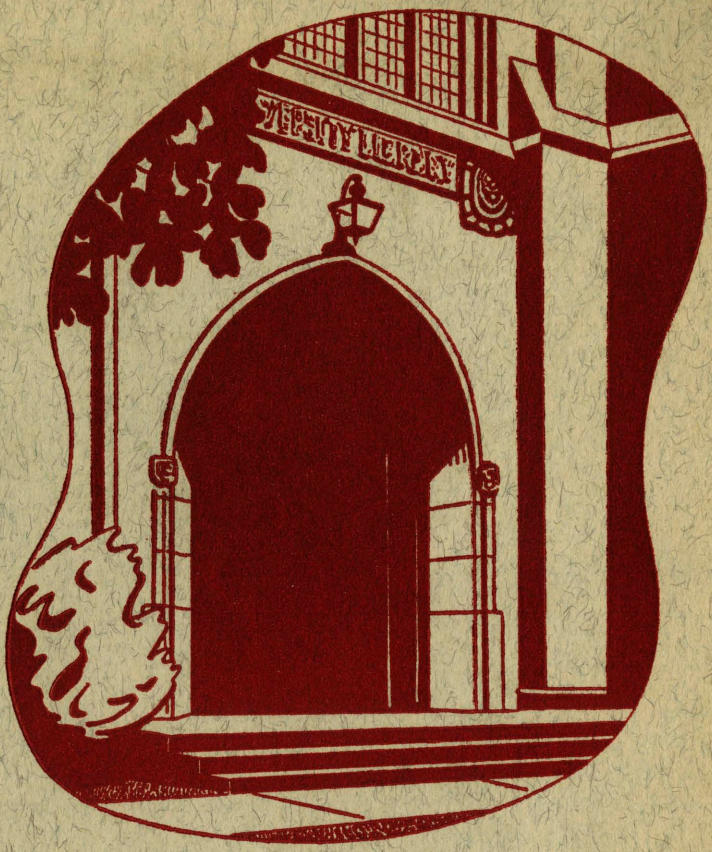

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE LIBRARY LECTURES

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE RECORD, EXTENSION SERIES

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Edited by KATHERINE L. MONTAGUE

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FOREWORD

The papers in this volume continue the series of "University of Tennessee Library Lectures" begun in the spring of 1949. The first three lectures were published in 1952 as volume fifty-five, number one of the *The University of Tennessee Record.* The Lecture Series Committee feels that the next three lectures contained herein have maintained the worth-while quality of the earlier ones while testifying still further to the interest on this campus in a wide variety of library-related topics.

Dr. Robert B. Downs, Director of the Library and of the Library School at the University of Illinois and at that time president-elect of the American Library Association, spoke on April 21, 1952. A recognized authority on library resources, he was the logical choice to speak on the development of research collections in university libraries.

Dr. Lester Asheim, Dean of the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago, spoke on the study of reading effects for the fifth lecture, Monday, March 23, 1953. Still most timely in its relation to the problems of intellectual freedom and censorship, it presents a thoughtful and objective appraisal of the difficulties inherent in the study of what reading does to people.

Dr. Lawrence Clark Powell, Librarian of the University of California at Los Angeles and Director of the Clark Memorial Library on that campus, brought in the sixth lecture on March 5, 1954, an inspiring account of experiences in the magnetic field of books which has drawn him to many points of collectors' interest in this country and abroad.

The Lecture Series Committee takes pleasure in making these lectures available to a wider public. It acknowledges with gratitude the help of the staff of the University of Tennessee Library and of Mrs. Doris Frantz, formerly of the University of Illinois Library's reference staff, in verification of the footnote citations.

Katherine L. Montague
Assistant Science Librarian
University of Tennessee Library

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Library Lecture Number Four

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH COLLECTIONS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

ROBERT B. DOWNS

Library Lecture Number Four, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, April 21, 1952

Back in the seventeenth century, in the days of Francis Bacon and John Milton, scholars took all knowledge to be their province. It was generally taken for granted that a single human brain could comprehend and hold all existing learning. Today, that delusion has vanished, as knowledge has been broken down into more and more minute compartments and specialties. The burden of storing total human knowledge has been shifted to books—millions of books in great libraries. Only thus can we maintain any degree of control over the rapidly-widening horizon of science and learning.

Under today's conditions, it is inconceivable that scholars could be developed and trained and carry on their work without access to libraries. Even those subject fields which depend primarily on laboratories must support expensive libraries and elaborate abstracting and indexing services—records of earlier investigations and experiments—to help them avoid repetition of effort and to serve as points of departure for new scientific advances. It may be fairly stated that an adequate library is not only the basis of all teaching and study, but is an essential condition for research, without which additions are unlikely to be made to the sum of human knowledge.

While these facts concerning the vital role played by the library in the modern university can be asserted with little risk of contradiction, it must, nevertheless, be admitted that the library does create some serious practical difficulties for every educational institution. First of all, we are faced with an embarrassment of riches. Some 17,000,000 titles are estimated to have come from the printing presses since typography was invented in the fifteenth century. Which works are of sufficient permanent importance to be acquired by an institutional library? As someone remarked, "There are books bred of books, and in

turn breeders of other books. For no species is more proliferous than the species *liber.*" Book production goes on at a steadily accelerating rate. Since 1900, as many books have come from the presses as in the preceding 450 years. Paralleling that growth is the expansion of library collections.

The condition I have described has caused research libraries in recent years to search in a variety of directions for ways and means to hold in check the mounting flood of printed materials. National, regional, and local union catalogs and union lists have been created to locate books in other libraries. There are co-operative purchasing agreements, such as the Farmington Plan for the acquisition of foreign books. We have regional storage centers established for centralized housing of little-used books, e.g., the New England Deposit Library in Boston and the Midwest Inter-Library Center in Chicago. There are ambitious proposals for microfilming and microprinting large masses of material, in order to reduce their bulk for storage purposes. We have programs for subject specialization among libraries to limit the number of fields each has to cover. And, running through most of these schemes, a widespread system of inter-library loans has grown up over the years.

Viewing the present complex state of affairs, some pessimists suggest that books in their traditional form are obsolete and will be replaced soon by newer media of communications, for example, motion pictures, microfilm and microprint, telephoto, wire and tape recordings, television, and facsimile newspapers transmitted by radio. While I am willing to concede that these revolutionary techniques are important and useful, I incline strongly to the view of Joseph Wood Krutch, who pointed out that, "The printed word is still the most generally efficient and effective method of conveying thought or information ever invented by men, and over the largest of all fields a hundred words is often worth a thousand pictures."

From the point of view of the individual research library as it develops its collections, the fundamental answer to high-speed printing presses is to be found in selectivity of materials. No single library in the world has ever possessed all the books in existence, and any library in the future trying to reach that mirage is doomed to failure.

Prior to consideration of problems associated with building up the resources of a university library, let us define what is meant by research materials. Upon examination, we find that these materials break down into several major categories. Books, of course, make up a large proportion of most collections, but books and other monographic works are only a part of the scholar's requirements. For the past century, approximately, serial literature has been assuming an increasingly important place. The learned and technical journals, transactions of academies, societies, museums, observatories, universities, and institutions of all sorts, and the serial publications of governments take more and more of library funds, space, and attention. As an indication of the scope of the field, the *Union List of Serials in the United States and Canada,* which is by no means complete, records about 130,000 serial titles, 57 per cent extinct and 43 per cent current. In the biological sciences alone, there are at least 6,000 research periodicals, issued in more than twenty-five languages and publishing sixty to seventy thousand articles annually. A recent report of the Army Medical Library gave a figure of 7,500 for currently received serial titles in medicine. For a general university library supporting graduate study in as many as twenty-five departments, a current list of ten to twenty thousand journals is the minimum for keeping abreast of research activities and developments. It is probable that in the future we shall have even greater emphasis on materials appearing in serial form and decreasing emphasis on books and other monographic works.

Another great body of research material is government publications. There are not only the documents of the federal government, but also of the individual states, counties, and municipalities, plus millions of items issued by foreign governments. Much of the huge mass is ephemeral and fugitive; it almost never appears in the book trade, and its acquisition offers many difficulties. The field of government publishing, by the way, is a striking illustration of the accelerated production of printed matter. A comparison shows that the United Nations in its first two years of existence had spoken and printed more words than its predecessor, the League of Nations, produced in a quarter of a century.

The last of the major categories of research materials is collections of manuscripts. Such collections are always unique.

They vary so widely in nature that they must be evaluated individually and cannot be checked against any standard catalog or list, as we may do with printed works. Manuscripts are of fundamental importance to scholars in many fields, but particularly, of course, in history and literature.

These, then—the separately printed books, serials, government publications, and manuscripts—are the principal types of resources for research. They fail by far, however, to exhaust the varieties of records being accumulated by libraries today. Look, for illustration, at the statistics of holdings reported annually by the Library of Congress. We find there figures for each of the following groupings: volumes and pamphlets, bound newspaper volumes, manuscripts, maps and views, microcards, microfilms, motion pictures, music, phonograph records, photographic negatives, prints and slides, fine prints, and a miscellaneous catch-all, comprising broadsides, photostats, posters, etc.—an even dozen headings, most of them numbering hundreds of thousands or millions of items. It would be a very backward library indeed, nowadays, which failed to make liberal provision for such non-book research materials as maps, slides, motion picture films, music and speech recordings, music scores, prints, and a score of other similar classes.

With this attempt at a definition of research materials to determine just what it is that we, as university librarians, are trying to collect, let us turn now to the question of how to attack the problem of developing the library's resources. The job is a many-sided one, involving, as it does, assembling collections in the special subject fields covered by the institution's program, collections of general types of material—public documents, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, etc.—and perhaps one or more distinctive special collections. Building up the library also involves the cooperation of the university administration, faculty, students, library staff, and others; and, of course, the old bugaboo of financial support is constantly with us.

Preliminary to any program of developing research facilities, there should be a study of the collections serving each department. From those data, it can be determined what areas within special fields need attention now or at some future time. For the purpose, an analysis worked out by the late Donald Gilchrist

of the University of Rochester several years ago is highly suggestive and useful.[1] Gilchrist concluded that there are four different stages which can be recognized in rating a library's resources in special subject fields. The first stage is a general information collection, consisting of some textbooks, selected editions of important works of major authors, a few historical surveys, biographies, and several selected periodicals for keeping in touch with current progress in the field. A collection of that character would be the minimum needed for undergraduate work.

A second stage would be characterized as a well-rounded reference collection. It would include a wider range of basic texts; complete collections of the works of more important figures, both authors and critics; selections from the works of secondary writers; a wider range of representative journals; and some of the fundamental bibliographical apparatus pertaining to the special field. This type of collection would take care of the needs of upperclass students and give them an opportunity to work out special assignments.

The third stage is a fundamental research collection. Here would be found all the important or useful texts, probably in original editions of older classics in the field. There would be collections of published sources and an extensive assemblage of critical and biographical works; also, contemporary pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, published documents, and the fullest possible list of journal sets and bibliographical tools.

The fourth, and most advanced, stage is a comprehensive and specialized research collection, comprising everything which can be gathered on the subject. In addition to the materials in the third stage, it would include original and variant editions for comparative textual and bibliographical studies, manuscripts, letters, collateral and illustrative materials, photostats or microfilms of unique materials in other collections, clippings, photographs, etc.

For the purpose of such an analysis, a subject field may be subdivided as fully as necessary. One branch may have reached an advanced stage of development; another division would be more

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[1]Donald B. Gilchrist, personal letter.

or less retarded. Some fields of study, history and literature, for example, might conveniently be broken down by periods. Other fields, geology, for instance, could be divided geographically. One library which undertook a detailed evaluation and review of its holdings, according to the plan suggested, discovered such facts as these:

In art and archaeology, sculpture, Greek art, and manuscript illumination were strong; architecture, Greek and Roman topography, and Oriental art weak. English literature was strong in dramatic works of the Renaissance period, but weak in non-dramatic literature of that era. Geology was weak in paleontology, but unusually strong in pre-Cambrian and Scandinavian geology. Psychology was found to be rich in material relating to psychology of the blind, but weak in industrial psychology. These instances were typical of conditions in every department.

The primary purpose of the kind of study proposed is to give the librarian and the faculty an over-all view of the strength and weakness of the library's collections and to help determine what fields are particularly in need of intensive attention. The librarian should not attempt to make the survey alone but should call on all the specialized knowledge of the faculty for help in appraising the library's resources. It is most desirable, however, for the librarian to be intelligent about each field and to have as much basic knowledge as possible. Sufficient backgound can be acquired, if he lacks it, by becoming familiar with the literature of a subject through the best available handbooks, e.g., Parke's *Guide to the Literature of Mathematics and Physics,* Hicks' *Materials and Methods of Legal Research,* and Wright's *Aids to Geographical Research,* and by reading a history of the field and a good introductory textbook. (Incidentally, it seems to me that by the nature of their profession, librarians are the last of the encyclopedists, compelled to have at least a superficial knowledge of every branch of learning, though the Dean of the Illinois College of Law, to whom I made that statement recently, took issue with it, claiming that lawyers likewise must be encyclopedists.)

As we examine the materials for research in various disciplines, we discover that many of them fall into well-defined

patterns. An excellent analysis was prepared by Dr. William Warner Bishop of the University of Michigan some years ago.[2] Dr. Bishop pointed out that for most of the sciences, the literature of mathematics is fundamental. In the biological, chemical, and physical sciences the basic materials are complete sets of specialized journals, followed by transactions of societies and institutions in these fields. Ranking third in importance are monographic publications, handbooks, and encyclopedias. In the applied sciences of medicine, surgery, and chemical technology, the situation is similar. In other words, the zoologist, the botanist, the chemist, and the surgeon are concerned first of all with the journals in their fields, because it is there they learn most promptly about the latest discoveries and investigations.

In the so-called "earth sciences"—geology, paleontology, mineralogy, geography and geophysics—the journal literature is also highly important, but it is supplemented extensively by government publications; for instance, the innumerable reports of geological surveys.

Among the earth sciences, agriculture leads all the rest in its rate and scope of publishing activity. The range is from reports of highly scientific and technical investigations, quite beyond the comprehension of the average man on the farm, to floods of popular bulletins for home consumption. Research in agriculture, costing hundreds of millions of dollars annually, is being carried on continuously, and growing out of it is a steady stream of books, pamphlets, and journals flowing into our libraries.

When we scan the research materials needed by social scientists—i.e., historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, lawyers—the diversity of forms is much greater than for the biological and physical sciences. In addition to numerous journals and society proceedings, government publications are basic, as are published archives, laws, treaty collections, court reports, maps, newspaper files, census reports, and other statistical compilations. A high proportion of the essential works are separately published books and monographs.

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[2]William W. Bishop, "The Responsibility of American Libraries for the Acquisition of the Materials for Research," in *The Acquisition and Cataloging of Books; Papers Presented before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago, July 29 to August 9, 1940,* ed. William M. Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1940), pp. 30-58.

From the viewpoint of the general university library, probably the largest single classification is language and literature. Periodicals devoted to language and literature studies are relatively few, and a majority of these are university-sponsored and supported. The great mass of research materials is in book form, printed from 1450 to date. Looking at world literature as a whole, American libraries are inclined to be provincial. The amount of literary material in any major language is, of course, tremendous, and only the largest libraries can hope to maintain comprehensive collections. That is doubtless the chief reason why we have been willing to relinquish to the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and a few major university libraries responsibility for building up and maintaining divisions of Chinese, Japanese, Hindustani, Korean, Arabic, Russian, and dozens of lesser-known languages. Most of us feel sufficiently troubled with Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, French, Spanish, and Italian, without branching out into such difficult tongues as Ceylonese, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, Gujarati, Burmese, Javanese, Malay, Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese, Armenian, Kurdish, Persian, Pushtu, and Turkish, which, according to a recent letter from Dr. Luther Evans, are now concerning the Library of Congress, and which the Library of Congress would be happy to share with the rest of us. I wonder, with the increasingly important role played by America in world politics and with the area study programs being developed in our universities, and like factors, whether many of our libraries will not soon be starting active collecting in languages now largely unknown to them.

But this is a digression. To return to our cursory review of types of material in the principal subject fields, in another category—the fine arts and their applications—journals and other serial publications are rather numerous, essential for research, and usually expensive. Other kinds of material, however, are equally necessary, e.g., monumental collections of sources, prints, slides, photographs, sheet music, music recordings, and architectural drawings.

The last of the great fields is philosophy and religion. Most university librarians would probably like to leave the area to professional schools of theology, but we find that much graduate study and research in ancient and medieval history and literature

and philosophy are dependent upon works generally classified in theology and related topics. Books, journals, and society transactions are all present in great numbers. To cite one example, a large body of collected sources, scriptural commentaries, council decisions, and similar records have grown up around the history and doctrines of Christianity.

In addition to the fields mentioned, new areas are developing constantly. In recent years, for instance, we have witnessed the rapid expansion of education, psychology, business administration, and communications—all prolific in the publication of periodicals, society proceedings, statistical series, dissertations, books, and pamphlets.

What emerges from this over-all view of the materials for research in fields covered by a majority of university libraries? The strongest single impression, I believe, is the immense scope of our responsibilities. If this were interpreted without restraint or well-defined policies, we would soon find ourselves swamped completely, for no library in the world has the financial ability, space, or staff to be all-inclusive. We return, therefore, to my earlier point, the necessity for selectivity, and stemming from that, the need for specialization of fields.

Numerous factors have created the need for specialization. Chief among these, as indicated, are problems growing out of the tremendous increase in publication of books, government documents, periodicals, and other library materials. Obvious aspects of the problem include overcrowded stacks, insufficient book funds, bottleneck processing departments, and our failure to make published literature fully available.

One factor showing the desirability of specialization is the problem created by minute divisions of large fields and extreme specialization of subjects. Virtually every large research field has become infinitely subdivided. A scientist, Dr. Fernandus Payne of Indiana University, expressed it as follows: "Men who formerly thought of themselves as zoologists, now are embryologists, experimental embryologists, geneticists, cytologists, endocrinologists, protozoologists, mammalogists, ecologists, entomologists, morphologists, physiologists, general physiologists, cellular physiologists, taxonomists, conchologists, ornithologists, and so on ad infinitum."

It should be recognized, however, that there are obstacles to specialization in university libraries. One is curriculum changes. An institution may start offering graduate courses or bring in faculty members interested in doing research in fields not hitherto represented, making it mandatory on the library to acquire supporting materials. Or, as the reverse of that situation, the university may drop certain courses of study, eliminating the demand for library facilities in those subjects.

Another impediment to specialization, particularly in private institutions, is financial instability. Many libraries have endowments for special collections and they must continue to specialize indefinitely in the fields endowed, while other special collections remain at a standstill because no funds are provided for their maintenance.

The subject of special collections calls for further comments. Critics sometimes object to overemphasis on so-called "special collections," maintaining they take too much of the time, funds, and space needed for everyday and perhaps more essential purposes. Nevertheless, there are sound reasons for developing and maintaining special collections in the university library. Among the values are prestige and scholarly distinction for a library which owns a famous special collection; stimulation to research by faculty members and graduate students; and use of the materials for exhibition and instructional purposes. The choices of fields for special collections are virtually without limit. Every subject has endless ramifications, almost any of which can be expanded into a special collection. To cite two examples at random, the library of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, which recently went to Dartmouth College, is a collection of 25,000 volumes and 20,000 pamphlets on polar exploration; and the Michael Sadleir collection of Victorian fiction, just purchased by the University of California at Los Angeles, numbers 12,000 volumes.

Most special collections in libraries come by way of gifts, either of money or books. The celebrated rare book libraries of the country have almost invariably had such a basis—the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Henry E. Huntington, Folger Shakespeare, John Carter Brown, John Crerar, Newberry, and many less well known. The reasons are obvious. Few libraries have the funds to go out and buy the rare and costly items which form

the cornerstones of most special collections. They simply cannot compete with wealthy private collectors. Therefore, they wait until the private collector passes on, leaving his prizes to an institution.

One field for a special collection in a university library is the records of the institution itself, an area I would consider a definite obligation of the library and one that should not be neglected. There are three types of material to consider in building up this kind of collection: first, the publications and official records of the university (catalogs, reports, periodicals, student yearbooks, newspapers, archives, manuscripts, and ephemerae); second, material about the university (published histories, periodical articles, newspaper clippings, etc.); and, third, books and other publications by members of the faculty, students, and alumni. If the university has a distinguished author among its alumni, it would be appropriate to collect first editions and other writings by and about that individual.

Another natural field for a special collection in the university library, especially in a state institution, is material, both in printed and manuscript form, about the community, state, or region in which the institution is located. The collection might include not only the historical aspects, but publications of contemporary interest on natural resources, education, government, etc.

In a collection of the kind, manuscript records are likely to form an important division, and perhaps here is an appropriate place to comment on policies governing manuscript preservation. There are two classes of material which should nearly always be saved. One is strictly personal papers; the second is the records of clubs and other organizations. As to the first category, the bulk of most personal papers is composed of letters, and even in the case of unimportant people, collections of letters are likely to contain some interesting and valuable items. Historians are no longer interested solely in the personal papers of great statesmen, political leaders, and other prominent personages. The records left by obscure and unknown persons frequently shed much light on historical events. For example, some of the most valuable primary sources we have of pioneer days in America are contained in the letters, diaries, and autobiographies left by

first settlers, explorers, adventurers, farmers, trappers, travelers, and miners, most of whom are relatively unknown figures in our national history. The papers they have left, however, are the basic materials for history, giving us a firsthand, day-to-day picture of historical developments which we can get in no other way.

The second class of manuscripts which should be preserved are the records of clubs, churches, schools, fraternal orders, and other organizations. The archives of a club or a church are seldom voluminous, but they may have a good deal of social significance for the community, as well as for the organization and the individuals associated with it.

There is a third type of manuscript so space-consuming that libraries can hardly afford to save more than a representative collection. These are business archives. It is not practicable to keep all the records of grocery stores, drug stores, factories, beer parlors, barber shops, beauty shops, and other business establishments in a large community, but it is probably desirable to retain a collection that will be representative of various kinds of businesses and of different periods.

Most manuscripts which libraries receive will classify under one of these three groups: personal, organizational records, and business papers.

Continuing with possibilities for special collections in university libraries, any collection should have a definite relationship to the program of the institution. For example, a field might be chosen because of local industrial or other conditions, as was done by Lawrence College in its collection on paper chemistry, Duke University on tobacco, University of Minnesota on Scandinavian literature, University of Wyoming on wool, and the University of Washington on oceanography and fisheries.

More frequently, the choice of subject is made for the library by the special interests of one or more members of the faculty, or through presentation to the library of an already formed collection acquired by a private individual. In the latter case, if a collection is offered in some field in which the institution has no possible interest, it is better to refuse the gift and suggest that it be given to a more appropriate library. I recall the action

taken by Dr. Charles H. Brown several years ago in rejecting the donation of an important genealogical collection to Iowa State College Library. He pointed out that the College was interested in the family histories of livestock, but not of human beings.

Methods of developing a special collection are naturally determined by the field covered. Of course, if the nucleus of the collection is acquired from a private library, much of the groundwork may have been done. It is essential, however, if the material is to be of genuine value, that the collection be maintained by current acquisitions. Whoever is responsible for the growth of the collection ought to be constantly on watch as wanted items come on the market. Dealers' and publishers' catalogs should be checked regularly and promptly. Telegrams and cables should be used to avoid losing key pieces. Dealers should be informed that the library is interested in particular fields. Advertisements in the book trade journals can be used to advantage in locating out-of-the-way books; that plan is better, on the whole, than working through individual dealers, since these periodicals are received and checked by a large percentage of the book trade.

It is well to know at the beginning what types of materials are available in the library's field of special interest, and then to establish a definite policy as to what kinds will be collected. The subject, for example, might include records as diverse as books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, maps, and manuscripts. Does the library want to be all-inclusive, or does it want to limit its activities to certain categories?

As an instance of the ramifications of a special collection, I might cite, from personal experience, the Hanes Foundation for the Study of the Origin and Development of the Book, at the University of North Carolina. No restrictions of any sort were placed on the collection's scope, providing only that any items added related to the history of writing and printing. The preliminary steps were to acquire all the good secondary sources, and, accordingly, there were purchased published histories of writing and printing, technical treatises, biographies of famous printers, bibliographies of incunabula, and similar background works. The heart of the collection, however, was to be original examples of writing

and printing from all over the world, but especially from the Orient, Europe, and America. Beginning with the earliest surviving records, examples were obtained of clay tablets and cones, Egyptian and Greek papyri, ostraca or potsherds from ancient Greece, palm leaf books from Ceylon and India, parchment manuscripts of medieval times, and early specimens of paper. Printing was covered from the incunabula of the fifteenth century to fine printing from modern private presses. In addition, there were such ramifications as chained books, examples of book binding and book illustration of all periods, manuscript illumination, printing in unusual languages, etc. This instance illustrates the depths into which one can get in almost any large field of collecting.

In the building of special collections, as well as research facilities in general, microreproductions are proving valuable allies. No longer will research materials be concentrated in the few large research institutions with sufficient wealth to buy rare books. There will be less dependence in future on interlibrary loans and the scholar will not need to travel widely to round up his sources. Consider just a few of the major microfilm projects under way or completed for reproducing large groups of research materials: (a) all English books before 1640; (b) all extant magazines published in the United States before 1850; (c) 2,500,000 pages of official records of the forty-eight states, beginning with the colonial period; (d) English literary periodicals of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries; (e) 5,000 English plays from 1500 to 1800, and American plays from the beginning to 1830; (f) early British and Continental works on rhetoric and elocution not commonly available in American libraries; (g) the most important items of Americana from 1493 to 1790; and (h) on microprint, British Sessional papers of the nineteenth century. I do not pretend that scholars will accept microreproductions enthusiastically, for they will prefer the book in its traditional form. No compromise is ever wholly satisfactory. Nevertheless, by way of these techniques, we as librarians can provide faithful and usable copies of materials that may otherwise be completely inaccessible.

To conclude this discussion, in which my intention has been to review only the high lights of the university library's ac-

quisition problems, it should be stressed that a library is never finished. A book collection that has stopped growing is a dead collection and soon loses most of its interest and value for the scholar. Furthermore, our ideas about the nature and contents of a research library are constantly evolving. A library which would have satisfied our clientele yesterday may be deemed quite inadequate tomorrow. The university library, therefore, must be a dynamic, living organism, fully responsive to change, and always looking to the future.

Library Lecture Number Five

THE STUDY OF READING EFFECTS

LESTER ASHEIM

Library Lecture Number Five, University of Tennessee Library
Knoxville, March 23, 1953

There has recently been published a book entitled *The Books in My Life* by Henry Miller[1], which attempts to trace all of the reading that, in one way or another, has had some influence on its author—his philosophy, his attitudes and opinions, and his literary style. Paradoxically, most of Mr. Miller's own books have had very little chance to exert their influence over his fellow Americans.

That he should write such a book was suggested to him by a librarian[2]—a fact which, although it seems to have surprised Mr. Miller, really ought to surprise no one. Surely one would expect librarians to be interested in an analysis of the effects of reading, since they have devoted their lives to a profession which has meaning only if books are influential. Not the number of books in his library, but the effect that the book has upon its readers is the gauge of the librarian's contribution and value to society.

The librarian is not alone in the strong conviction that reading exerts an influence over the reader; that belief is shared with equal fervor by the librarian's antagonist—the censor. Now this is an odd and disconcerting thing, for, starting with the same basic premise, the librarian and the censor come to conclusions which are poles apart. The librarian would disseminate the materials of communication more widely; the censor would restrict their dissemination. The librarian would make his shelves free to all; the censor would delimit the audience. The librarian would open his library to all points of view; the censor would eliminate all but the approved viewpoints. And each would justify his stand on the grounds that books affect readers. I submit that neither the censor nor the librarian has produced suf-

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[1]Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* (London: P. Owen, 1952).

[2]Lawrence Clark Powell, Librarian, University of California at Los Angeles.

ficient positive evidence about the actual effects of reading to justify either course of action.

Librarians, and others who have a vested interest in the book, have usually attempted to defend their resistance to censorship in one of two ways. One is to point to some of the ridiculous instances of censorship in the past as evidence that censorship, per se, is foolish. It is easy to show that most of the accepted classics of literature—from Shakespeare to Shaw, from Aristophanes to Gilbert and Sullivan, from Fielding to Freud to Faulkner—have at one time or another been banned by zealous reformers, and that in the end the Dreisers invariably outlive the Comstocks. But this kind of counterattack is not a real answer; at most it shows merely that in some cases censorship was ill-advised or that times change; at worst, it may well convince the censors that the listed titles do indeed deserve repression. The librarian who protests a ban on *From Here to Eternity* on the grounds that it is no worse than many accepted classics, like those by Fielding for example, may well find himself losing both the Jones boys—Tom as well as James.

The other defense of books is to assert the good affects which ideally accrue from reading. Because it is typical and better formulated than most others of its kind, I should like to quote from the address of Sir Norman Birkett before the National Book League in 1951:

> To live with the choicest spirits of all ages, to share their thoughts, to enter into their feelings, to be uplifted with them and to be cast down, to tread with them the common ways as well as to enter the holy of holies, to see human nature in all its infinite manifestations, is to gather slowly and insensibly, but very surely, the wisdom that comes only from human experience. There follows, too, a quickening of the perceptions, a sharpening of the taste, an insight, an understanding, and a growing sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men. The use of reading . . . is to make a better man in the most significant use of that term.[3]

This is a beautiful ideal, but it *is* an ideal and certainly a maximum statement. And if I were a censor, I should not find it too

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[3]Sir Norman Birkett, *The Use and Abuse of Reading* (London: Published for the National Book League by the Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 10-11.

difficult to answer, since one must assume that Sir Norman does not claim that these results can be obtained from the reading of any penny dreadful one comes upon. What he is pleading for is reading of the best kind—and the censor claims to be pleading for the same thing.

How do we reply if the censor claims that books have the power also to mislead and disturb; to inculcate false ideas and ideals; to make a man worse, not better? I think we are in a bad position if we try to claim, without evidence, that only good effects can be obtained from reading; if reading has any effect, it may well have bad effects as well as good ones. And we dare not say that books are ineffective, for then our lives—devoted to the promotion of reading—are totally wasted. How, then, can we show the good effects of reading? How can we prove that the censors are wrong without losing our whole reason for being?

I do not know that we can. But I think we ought to take the chance by trying to study some actual reading effects; to learn what we can about what reading really does to people, whether we like what we find or not. During the recent congressional hearings on obscene literature, John O'Connor of Bantam Books, appearing before the Gathings Committee, suggested that the investigation would be more objective and balanced, and therefore more useful, if it would gather testimony by psychologists and experts in the social sciences on the relationship of reading to actual behavior—"not assuming that there is more of a relationship than does exist."[4] Thus we see a publisher, who must certainly wish to feel that books are influential, calling for evidence which may prove that books are not so influential after all.

Some studies in this field have been carried out often by the supporters of censorship. Many of you will remember the Payne Fund Studies which showed, to the satisfaction of the writers of the studies, that the movies were definitely a source of ideas for young delinquents.[5] To the facts which all of us know—that many people copy the hairdos, the clothes, the mannerisms, and the wise cracks of favorite stars—the investigators added the datum that youthful lawbreakers get their ideas for

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[4]Will Oursler, "Books on Trial," *Library Journal*, LXXVIII (February 1, 1953), 175.

[5]For example, Herbert Blumer and Philip M. Hauser, *Movies, Delinquency, and Crime* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

crimes from the movies. While this is not impossible, there is reason to question the validity of evidence based upon interviews with young people in juvenile courts and detention homes. Asked if they got their bad ideas from the movies, they replied —naturally—"yes." That tells us something about the method of investigation, but little about the real influence of films. The evidence about comic books now being utilized is of much the same nature.[6]

The need, then, is for some really reliable studies of the effects of reading which would show whether reading has any effects at all, under what circumstances it has what kinds of effects, and whether the direct reproduction of physical acts is a typical effect or not.

There are, of course, many effects from our reading which occur daily, and the results of which can readily be seen. Far more direct in their influence on us than any of the "books that have changed our minds" are the daily routine reading experiences we encounter: the stop and go signs, the no smoking notices, the billboards and advertisements, the written directions. Daily we alter our activities in line with things we read, without once giving them a thought.

But it is not this kind of reading which concerns us; our interest lies in the subtler field of reading in which thought is involved. This kind of study of effects is very difficult, for reading is only one activity among many from which people get ideas. We cannot go to the bookshelf of a young delinquent and assume a direct connection between his action and his reading if we happen to find some detective novels among his books. We cannot assume that the reader of *Harper's* who voted for Stevenson was influenced to do so by the magazine's articles. A multitude of forces plays upon each of us to shape our attitudes, beliefs, opinions and actions; how can we pin down a specific reading to tie it in with its specific results?

There are ways. Studies in the field of the social sciences are constantly faced with problems of this nature, and the design of an adequate study, while not easy, is not impossible. Let me summarize a couple of the studies which have been accomplished

[6]Paul W. Tappan, *Juvenile Delinquency* (1st ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949), pp. 148-154.

in this field, merely to use them as examples of the way in which a research can be set up to meet some of the problems.

One way to pinpoint effects of a reading is to give an attitude test to a group before and after a specific reading experience. This can be most readily accomplished in a classroom situation, where your readers can be forced to do a particular reading at a particular time and can be tested under circumstances which control other influences. Typical of such studies, and one of the better ones, is that of Evalene Jackson who attempted to measure the effects of reading upon attitudes toward the Negro race.[7] In this experiment, two equated groups of southern white junior high school students were given an attitude test. Then one group was given a prepared fiction reading presenting the Negro race in a favorable light; then both groups were retested on attitudes. The groups were matched on sex, IQ, age, and socio-economic status, and all had been born and raised in the particular southern city where the test was given. Thus most of the factors which are presumed to affect attitudes were held constant for all those who took the test; they had grown up in the same kind of society, had gone to the same schools, had been subjected to the same shaping forces, EXCEPT that one group had done a particular reading, and one had not. The result was that a small but significant change in attitude, reflecting the emphasis in the reading, was shown on the part of the experimental group. The study went one step farther; it retested both groups two weeks later. The second test showed an almost total loss of the change.

On the basis of such a study one can hypothesize that reading can influence basic attitudes, but that real results from reading are cumulative. In other words, if one reading can change your mind, another reading can change it back, and lasting results can be expected only if ideas are constantly reinforced—not only in reading but in other communication contacts as well. In this particular instance, we have no evidence that the readers translated their attitudes into action; all that we have is a change in attitude—which did not last.

Classroom situations are special, of course, and it is dangerous to generalize too widely on the basis of such an experiment. The

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[7]Evalene P. Jackson, "Effects of Reading Upon Attitudes Toward the Negro Race," *Library Quarterly*, XIV (January, 1944), 47-54.

mere fact that the group was being tested and knew it can have a partial shaping effect, and, in any case, assigned classroom reading is not the same as reading we elect to do on our own. The measurement of the effects of such reading has been pretty much limited to the study of political opinion and action, since in the vote we have a tangible result which may be traced back to its several causes. One of the more interesting studies in this field has been reported in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* for April-June, 1936.[8] In this experiment, the investigator prepared two leaflets for use in a local election. One was a straightforward, academic argument and the other an emotional, personal appeal—both for the Socialist party. Two districts were matched on general characteristics; then one district received the rational leaflet at every house; the other received the emotional leaflet at every house. No other district in the city received either leaflet, and no additional material was especially distributed other than that which was part of the normal campaign and distributed to all parts of the city. Presumably, then, everyone in the town had access to similar material concerning the election except for these two instances; a rational Socialist pamphlet in one district, an emotional one in the other. Now, as it happened in that election, the Socialist vote increased throughout the city—which illustrates the reason for using the entire city as a control. For the amount of increase in the non-propagandized districts was only 24%; whereas in the rational pamphlet district, it was 35%, and in the sentimental pamphlet district, 50%! On the basis of this study, again it would appear that reading does have an effect, that emotional appeals are more effective than academic ones, and that written argument calling for specific action may well result in that action, when people turn to written argument for guidance.

Another approach to the study of effects is the individual case history, of which Mr. Miller's book, mentioned previously, is an example. Here we rely on remembrance and self-analysis to lead us to data about the effects of reading. There are many weaknesses in such a method: the subject does not know all of the instances in which reading has affected him; he tends to sup-

[8]George W. Hartmann, "A Field Experiment on the Comparative Effectiveness of 'Emotional' and 'Rational' Political Leaflets in Determining Election Results," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXXI (April-June, 1936), 99-114.

press some readings and overemphasize others either deliberately or unconsciously, and he must rely on memory, which is notoriously faulty in matters such as this. But it has the advantage of providing us with insights into a variety of reading experiences, not just a single one; it gives us a chance to probe the past, which can no longer be done in a laboratory situation; and, if we get enough samples, it begins to fill out the picture by the accumulation of evidence which no single case history can supply.

For the past three years I have been carrying on a small-scale study of what students believe to have been decisive readings in their past experience. Each student in my classes in "Communication" has been asked to submit a report on any occasion he can remember in which a reading changed his mind, affected his action, or in some way can be identified as exerting an influence. They were asked to search their memories for a precise instance—the moment of revelation when a piece of reading actually opened up a new idea or attitude or opinion to them—and to describe, as clearly as they could, the nature of the reading and its effect.

This is not a scientific study, and I would point out its weaknesses with some severity if a student of mine attempted to introduce such a project as a doctoral research. But the answers received do represent a group covering a wide range of ages, from late teens through late forties, a large sampling of both sexes and a wide variety of subject interests. The respondents come from classes at both the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, and include students from all parts of the United States and many foreign countries. For what it is worth, then, the study does provide us with some steps in the direction of identifying the categories in which effects might be studied.

So far, 256 different people have submitted reports, and only seven of them have stated that no book has ever had an influence on them. Ninety-one fiction and 119 non-fiction titles have been mentioned, yet of these 210 titles, only 26 (not counting the Bible) were mentioned by more than one person. And of these, the quality ranged from *War and Peace* to Richard Halliburton.

Two things interest me most in the data thus gathered. One is the kind of influences which the students identify; the other

is the kind of reading which exerts the influence. Let us look briefly at what has been reported on these two points.

The influence most frequently mentioned by the students is that the particular reading INCREASED THEIR UNDERSTANDING in a general way. This category includes the kind of influence which broadens the outlook and leads to a better understanding of the world, of the immediate environment, of others, or of themselves. It is cited most frequently as a result of reading fiction, where the author's interpretation and analysis of character frequently lead to a greater tolerance and sophistication (in its best sense).

Much lower on the list is that special aspect of increased understanding which comes through IDENTIFICATION. This refers specifically to those cases in which the reader sees in his reading the particular problem which faces *him* and borrows a solution to his own questions from the solution presented to his reading. This kind of effect is reported both for fiction and non-fiction: one reader found the parallel she needed in the real life incidents in Eleanor Roosevelt's *This is My Story;* another, in Thomas Wolfe's fictional Eugene Gant. In each case, the reading was like going to a friend to discover what he had done in an experience similar to your own.

The second most frequently mentioned effect is that of actually CHANGING AN ATTITUDE. This surprised me somewhat; I would have guessed that attitudes are seldom completely reversed by reading alone, but the students report thirty-three different instances where this occurred. I have included under this heading only those cases where the reader had a point of view already and had it changed by his reading; the changes may range from those of broad social significance (in one case, the reader's attitude towards international relations was changed by his reading of *One World*) to those of limited and totally personal importance (a reader overcame her fear of dogs by reading *Lassie Come-Home).*

The next most frequently mentioned effect was that of REINFORCING OR CONFIRMING AN OPINION. This includes all cases where a reader found added evidence to support a point of view which he already held, thus confirming him even more strongly in his original belief. In studies of the effects of reading in the

field of politics, this particular effect was found to be one of the most common; people tend to seek out the arguments with which they are already in agreement; they even are able to read arguments on the other side without assimilating them, screening out what is disturbing and remembering only those parts of the argument which please them. It is not so much that people believe what they read, but that they contrive to read what they already believe.

Another expected effect of reading is its ability to STIMULATE INTEREST in a particular subject field. Thus, the reading of Pater's *The Renaissance* led the reader to take more interest in painting and to appreciate works of art other than literature. The reading of *Shelton of Tibet* stimulated an interest in missionary work which resulted in the choice of a profession. Into this category fall all those readings on a subject which alerted the reader to closer attention to the several aspects of the subject, often leading him away from further reading but in the direction of increased intellectual activity of some other kind.

Next in importance, in terms of the number of times it was mentioned, is the effect of being a SHAPING INFLUENCE on the general outlook of the reader. Of twenty-five different listings of this specific effect, eight mentioned Bible reading as the influence, and twelve others mentioned works in the field of religion. Here the effect is difficult to pin down; it results in a generalized attitude which cannot be tied to a specific sentence or idea, but to an over-all atmosphere which the books create. From such reading, the students reported the finding of standards and values against which they measure all activities; the influence, while it comes generally from books about religion, is not limited to the field of religious belief but informs all of the reader's ideas and decisions.

Closely allied to this kind of an effect, but much more specific, is the reading which leads to POSITIVE ACTION of some kind. The shaping influence of reading (mentioned above) affects thought and attitudes, but does not necessarily lead to an overt act which can be isolated and identified. In half of those cases in which positive action was claimed as a result of reading, the action was merely more reading, either of books on the same subject or books by the same author. In four cases childhood reading led

to fantasy play in which the reader enacted the role of the story's hero. On the adult level, one reader was moved to make a trip to the scene of a favorite book; another to enroll in the Graduate Library School as a result of reading the School's *Announcements;* and one—talk about dramatic identification!—after reading *Main Street* broke her engagement because her fiancé planned to become a doctor in a small town!

The creation of a NEW ATTITUDE and the CRYSTALLIZATION OF AN ATTITUDE NOT YET COMPLETELY FORMED were two types of effects, each of which received an equal number of mentions. The first category includes those instances in which an idea which had never occurred to the reader before comes to his attention from his reading; it is quite different from a changed attitude (which reverses a way of thinking) or a confirmed attitude (which reinforces thinking already accomplished). The second category, crystallization of an attitude, differs slightly from all of these in that the reader has been thinking vaguely along certain lines, has not yet come to a positive conclusion one way or another, and finds in his reading the final key which brings his thoughts to resolution. In actuality, the chances are very good that this is really the most typical result of reading; the cumulative effect which, combined with other reading, listening, speaking, and looking, eventually shapes our attitudes without our being able to pin down the specific point at which our ideas crystallized. It is this kind of experience which makes the study of reading effects so difficult, since a single reading, and reading by itself, seldom have the dramatic effects which can be positively isolated. It complicates our censorship and control problems also, for the same book will affect different people differently depending on the point in time in which they came to it. Without previous reading and thinking about a problem, the book may not be able to reach us at all; coming in just the right sequence after much thought and other reading, it may bring into brilliant focus the idea towards which we were groping and settle us permanently in an attitude or viewpoint. Thus when we think we have pinpointed the decisive moment, we may well be overlooking the important groundwork established by other reading which made the decisive moment possible. The same book might not have been decisive at all a week earlier or a week later.

Another reported result from reading is that of DISILLUSIONMENT. This heading differs from that which identified a change in attitude in that, although the reading may have attacked a way of thinking, in no case did a substitute appear for what was lost. In other words, the category "disillusionment" is used to describe only those instances in which the reader lost his faith in something without a compensating faith to replace it.

In addition, it should be noted, as was mentioned earlier, that there were seven who could remember no particular reading that had had any identifiable effect and seven others who presumed some cumulative effects from reading, but none that could be specified.

Thus, on the basis of these reports, admittedly not definitive but merely suggestive, we have a set of categories under which the effects of reading can be studied. To recapitulate, in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned, reading did these things for the readers in my classes:

1—Increased their general understanding and tolerance.
2—Changed an attitude or belief.
3—Reinforced or confirmed an opinion.
4—Stimulated interest in some specific subject.
5—Gave shape to the reader's general outlook or philosophy.
6—Led to some positive action—usually further reading.
7—Created a new attitude.
8—Crystallized an attitude not yet completely formed.
9—Provided means of solving a personal problem through identification.
10—Led to disillusionment.
11—Had no effect.

We should probably add to these the recreational effect in its several aspects and the provision of specific knowledge, of which almost all textbook and reference reading would be examples. But these are essentially the effects deliberately sought by readers, whereas most of the reading effects listed by the students are unanticipated and in addition to such mundane results as accomplishing a class assignment or beguiling an idle hour. Finally, there is the effect which none of us would be able to recognize: the sharpening of the intellectual capacities which is fostered by the discipline of reading, in and of itself.

Our findings concerning the kinds of reading which brought about these effects will be a blow to the Great Books advocates, for very few of the influential books were the "great" ones, and many of them were not even very good. This underlines what many of us know, but what most of the studies tend to conceal—the highly individual character of the reading experience. Content analysis notwithstanding, the truth of the matter seems to be that reading effects depend less upon what is in the book than they do upon what the reader brings to it. Any book could be influential at a specific point in a reader's life; the same book and reader, brought together at some other time, might kindle no sparks at all. Thus to insist upon others reading the book which stimulated you is an understandable desire, but do not be surprised if they find nothing in it. Each man finds his own "best" books; the great works which are singled out by the professorial minds, as Henry Miller points out,[9] represent *their* choice exclusively. And while it may be that, if left to our own devices, we would in time share their point of view, each reader has to dig his own foundations if they are to have any meaning for him.

One of the things that is interesting in any analysis of reading effects is how the effect may, in some cases, be so much less than one would think a given book is possible of exerting; and in some cases, so much more than we usually give it credit for. Thus, the main effect of a reading of *Madame Bovary* on one student was that it showed her that all French novels are not as sexy as she had been led to believe. Another, reading *Swann's Way,* discovered that life today is less untidy than it was in Proust's time. Certainly these are hardly the effects which the literary critics would predict from a reading of these great seminal novels. On the other hand, a reading of *Black Beauty* had a lasting effect on one reader's attitude towards dumb animals; *The Vanishing American* developed a broad tolerance and understanding of minorities of all kinds which has lasted to this day; a Grace Livingston Hill novel read at age 13 created a warm feeling for home and family which has acted as the ideal for which to strive throughout a lifetime. If one were to hypothesize, he would guess that Proust would have a more profound effect

[9]Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

on a reader than Grace Livingston Hill; Flaubert than Zane Grey. He would not always be right.

The sense of literary style, while it may seem to dawn suddenly on the reader, does not come only from the book one happens to be reading at the time; it derives from a long experience with reading which happens to culminate in the moment. But the style of the book, so much in contrast with better-Cather was named by one student and Hemingway by another—in which a felicitous style makes itself felt. One student was surprised to find, while reading *Forever Amber,* that he realized that something was missing; it took a book without literary merit or psychological probability to make him realize that he had been learning to appreciate these qualities in other books. Thus without the contrast provided by the poorly written books, we might not develop so clear a sense of the good, the true, and the beautiful when we come upon it.

Many of the effects of reading derive as much from the situation as from the book itself. Thus, a student whose grandfather had read to her each night from the Old Testament finds in the Bible a great source of inspiration and solace, but the effectiveness of the reading is inseparable from the circumstances in which the reading was introduced. Similarly, many class discussions have had a stimulating effect upon the student which was not gained alone from the reading upon which the discussion was based. One student mentioned such a class discussion of *Mein Kampf,* where the effect was quite the reverse of that intended by its author.

Several such negative effects were reported. Often these result from a combination of circumstances and reading, as when the forced reading of *Ivanhoe* in high school led one student to avoid all English "classics" for about ten years. Many of us have had that experience; the book read too soon, or under unpleasant circumstances, which led us to a negative reaction to all books of a similar nature or by the same author.

But in many cases the reader rejects the book on the basis of his own serious evaluation of its contents. This is extremely important because it bears upon the literal-minded conception of art which so frequently underlies the defense of censorship.

It is not true that the response to a work of art is invariably the direct acceptance of the standards portrayed in it; literature is not advertising and the reader's response is quite different when you try to sell him a commodity from what it is when you try to sell him an idea. A person's reaction to a work of art is based on his total past experience and this includes, do not forget, all of his previous reading. With the heightened critical sense which is developed by wide reading, the reader can more readily recognize irrelevancy, false assumptions and fallacious reasoning. One student, for example, was predisposed to romanticism and read *The Fountainhead* with every reason to accept its major argument. But the style of the book, so much in contrast with better-written works he had read, demonstrated to him to what ridiculous lengths one may push undisciplined romanticism. He was forced thereby to a stern evaluation of the romantic philosophy generally, and in the end he rejected it, electing to take his stand in some other camp from one capable of leading a writer to such excesses. Thus a book can be influential without inducing agreement or approval, and the censors make their greatest error in clinging to their monkey-see-monkey-do concept of the effects of art. If our study of reading effects does nothing else, it demonstrates the wide variety of responses possible to a single work.

If additional studies of effects merely multiplied findings of this nature—a little more detailed, a little more reliable, a little better grounded in demonstrable evidence, but essentially like these—would we be able to convert the censor? Probably not. We might even have supplied him with some ammunition: evidence that people can be induced to vote for the Socialist ticket by pro-Socialist literature; evidence that young people can have their minds changed through reading, have their interest stimulated in ideas of all kinds, can be disillusioned; evidence that not only the good books but the less good can have their effect on readers. Since, as studies of reading have shown, most people read in line with their predispositions, the advocates of censorship will derive from our findings that which suits them best.

By the same token, those of us who resist censorship will find support for our point of view. We will see that reading increases

understanding, opens up horizons, stimulates interest in new ideas, provides support for the ideas worth saving, and leads to the rejection of those which cannot withstand rational assault. We will see that the value of reading is cumulative, that no one book is likely to be either harmful or beneficial unless the accumulated experience of the reader tends to support its arguments. This is not to say there cannot be harmful effects from reading, but that the best values come from reading which is wide and varied. Reading is most likely to be harmful when it is limited to a single viewpoint and a single type; when it tends to constrict our outlook rather than to broaden it.

In other words, reading is like all human experience—and here we are talking like Sir Norman Birkett—all of it adds something to our growth and development, even though not all of it is the kind we would choose if we had absolute control over events. We may wish to spare our children pain, and sorrow, and ugliness, but we only warp them if we try to eliminate from their experience all encounters with such phenomena. For these too are needed if we are to grow.

In any case, books only represent life—they are not life itself. If all the books which disillusion were scrapped tomorrow, we should still be unable to spare our children that inevitable moment when the first doll is broken, the first love affair goes awry, the first prayer remains unanswered. If we were to burn all the crime books, our youth would still live in the world and be able to knock on any door. And if, as adults, we never again were to see a book dealing with social or economic systems different from our own, we should still rub shoulders with inequalities, injustices, and intolerance and—thank God!—would seek a way to redress what seem to us to be wrongs.

The problems, then, we have with us, whether we have books or not. Those who will best be able to face up to the problems and work towards the best solutions will be those who bring to them the widest understanding, the deepest knowledge, the broadest experience, the profoundest recognition of all the facets and considerations of which the problem is composed, and practice, conscious or unconscious, in the analysis and evaluation of competing ideas. Within our limited lifetimes we can gain only

to a limited degree such knowledge and insight from our own immediate experience. Most of our experience will be gained vicariously, and even our own experience will often have meaning for us only through knowledge gained from the experience of others. Not all of it will be good; not all of it will have been worth the time it took to acquire; some of it might better have been replaced by other kinds. But we learn most when we find these things out for ourselves; the prescription and control of our reading by others robs even the potentially valuable books of their fullest impact upon us. A lifetime of reading, like life itself, is an undisciplined conglomeration of experiences upon which each of us imposes his own order and logic and sequence as he matures. In the end, none of it—neither the good nor the bad, the approved nor the disapproved—is without some meaning to the total pattern. The pattern we make is an index of our maturity, and no one else can make it for us.

Let us not deny the dangers. Wherever there are books and readers there are possibilities of misuse, because wherever there are people there are such possibilities. Rebecca West, seeking to explore the anatomy of treason, has written thus of the neighborhood where William Martin Marshall lived:

> It can be seen that the Marshalls live in the kind of street that is today a conduit of political danger. . . . Practically everybody in the street is the child of parents who had some schooling, and is himself literate. . . . Those that remain here are sensitive to print, they are within the radius over which complicated ideas broadcast themselves. Some will consider these ideas with deliberation and good sense, some will ignore them, some will embrace them too eagerly and insist that they be immediately applied. Round the corner from the Marshalls there lives a man who is coughing out his life and gives such moments as he can wrest from tubercular death to the service of the British Fascist Party as it has survived the war, addled and minuscule. He read the wrong books and did not quite understand what he was reading. This happens in such little streets all over Europe. . . .[10]

This is a great danger. But it is not so great a danger as the suppression of books and the restriction of reading. The answer

[10]Rebecca West, "Annals of Treason: The Mousetrap—I," *New Yorker*, XXVIII (February 14, 1953), 50.

to too little education is more education, not less; the antidote for confusion in the face of ideas is more contact with ideas, not less.

Ideas do come from books and reading. The ability to evaluate and interpret ideas grows as we exercise that ability on a variety of reading experiences. This we can say even now in the light of the few studies of reading effects now available. I hope we shall soon be able to say more.

Library Lecture Number Six

THE MAGNETIC FIELD

LAWRENCE CLARK POWELL

Library Lecture Number Six, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, March 5, 1954

Bookish people will know what I mean by the title of my talk, the Magnetic Field, that it is a figure of speech borrowed from science—a phrase somewhat magical and poetical in itself, and which is intended to set up a sympathetic response in my auditors, those of you who like myself are sensitive to books in their threefold aspect of material, intellectual, and spiritual being.

By magnetic field a scientist means that field of force around a magnet wherein a piece of iron, though not in contact with the magnet, will be attracted to it. Action-at-a-distance they call it. The concept of the natural magnet goes back centuries before the Christian era, when the Greeks knew that the mineral lodestone, a magnetic oxide of iron, had the power to attract other pieces of iron.

Books also are magnets, with the power to attract people. A single book may have this magnetic force, and when hundreds and thousands of books are brought together in bookshops and libraries, their power also is increased, so that such a place of bookish concentration possesses an irresistible attraction for readers and collectors, for you and for me.

If I were speaking to an audience of scientists, I would already be classified by them as a sentimental fellow, shamelessly borrowing their terminology to lend his talk a pseudo-modern slant. And in his anger at my nerve the scientist might even borrow his terminology from Gertrude Stein to insist that a book is a book is a book is a book, no more and no less than a man-made product of paper and ink, a mere lump of matter, mutely awaiting the passage of a man's eyes over its pages before it has any power of communication.

Now there may be scientists in my audience (I hope there are —this will be good for them), but if so, they are pretty sure to be bookish as well, and it will be their biblio-antennae that are extended tonight; and they will know, along with the rest of you,

that although my statement cannot be scientifically proved, it is none the less true that a book is one of the most powerful of all magnets, and that libraries and bookshops are places of power similar to the atomic piles wherein uranium is secretly split.

My talk will be about some of my adventures in these magnetic fields of bookshops and libraries—the fields in which I have spent the best years of my life since I first learned to read and to love books more than any other creation of man's mind and hand. And though I could never prove to a scientist's satisfaction that a book is even more magnetic than the lodestone of iron oxide, I shall simply offer some examples of how this mechanism of flesh and blood and bone and something more, known as Librarian Powell, has responded to the magnetic power of books.

Three years ago I went on a book-hunting expedition to the British Isles. My chief weapon was a loaded checkbook. How to know what to aim at came from twenty years of experience in bookshops and libraries, plus knowledge of the resources and the needs of my own library, the University of California at Los Angeles. All of this was subjective knowledge that I carried in my head and drew upon with that invaluable bookman's tool, a memory (unfortunately not perfect) of thousands on thousands of books seen in the course of my travels and studies.

Science also was called upon to provide me with a piece of equipment to help in the location of unusually rare books. We have all heard of the Geiger counter which reveals the presence of radioactive materials. I worked with one of our engineers and with a surgeon in the medical school in the fabrication of a biblio-geiger counter, a minute electronic device located by surgery in the epidermis of the little finger, and which in proximity to very rare books, pamphlets, and manuscripts, begins delicately to tick and to tingle.

I had not been in London a month when the cost of this invention was far more than justified by the treasure it revealed. It happened like this. I was in a West End bookshop which dealt in very rare and expensive things, and although there was plenty to make my biblio-geiger counter function, the high prices raised the books out of my reach. I wandered around the shop, searching in vain for a bargain, and ended up in a back room that served

as a catch-all. It was strewn with odd volumes, an orchard full of culls, and in a corner I saw a mound of pamphlets. The owner answered my inquiring look by saying that they were the dregs of a choice seventeenth century collection that had come from a royal house in County Wiltshire. They had been creamed for rarities, he assured me, and what I saw was the skimmed whey.

I reached for a handful of the pamphlets, and jerked back my hand.

"What's the matter?" the dealer asked. "Did you see a spider?"

"Maybe it was," I said, reaching again and leafing through the pamphlets on the top of the mound. What had happened was that my counter had jumped to maximum registry and my heartbeat had matched it. I quickly turned off the counter and looked at something else.

"If you're interested in those pamphlets," the dealer said, "and will take the lot, they're yours for a dollar apiece. But if you insist on picking and choosing, they'll cost you two dollars apiece."

"How many are there?" I asked.

"Between two and three thousand," he replied.

"If I took the lot," I said, "duplication with what we have at home would run too high. Would you bundle them and let me work through them at home tonight? I'll probably keep several hundred of them."

The bookseller was agreeable, and so I took an enormous bundle home in a taxi with me to Chelsea, and spent most of the night hunting for the treasure that my tingler kept telling me was somewhere in the lot.

It was toward the gray of morning that I found it. The reason the dealer had missed it in his creaming of the lot was that it was a pamphlet smaller than the rest and was stuck slightly to the one on top of it, so that in handling one, both were turned. What was it? It was a pamphlet by William Penn, our great Quaker pioneer, who in the latter part of the seventeenth century published anonymously a brief essay on the need for peace in Europe by the establishment of a common parliament. It is an early plea for a United Nations, and in this particular edition of

1696 is so rare as to be known in only a single other copy, that in the Friends' Library in London.[1]

I took my find back the next morning and paid the bookseller cash for it. Not the two dollars agreed upon, no; I demanded the customary library discount. William Penn's pamphlet cost the sovereign state of California one dollar eighty cents net.

While in England I also did some collecting for my personal library. Ever since college days I have collected and read the books of D. H. Lawrence. I hope that I will not shock too many of you when I say that my favorite of his novels is the last one he wrote, which because of its frank language about love has never been legally allowed to be published in England and the United States.

Lady Chatterley's Lover was issued first by the author at Florence in 1928. I like the story of the Italian printer who set the book in type, not knowing a word of English. When he was warned that the book contained some very naughty English words, he asked what they were in Italian; and when he was told, he shrugged his shoulders, threw up his hands, and exclaimed, "But *we* do *that* every day!"

The first edition of *Lady Chatterley,* which consisted of one thousand numbered and signed copies on fine paper, is not too difficult to obtain and costs about fifty dollars. The truly rare edition of the book is the second edition, also printed at Florence in 1928, and limited to only two hundred copies. Instead of fine paper, they were printed on cheap stock which did not stand up under the heavy reading which all copies of this book understandably get.

I had never heard of, least of all seen, a copy of this second edition, until I learned about it from a reference in Lawrence's correspondence of the time. His bibliographer had never heard of it, but this passage in Lawrence's letter confirmed the existence, at least in 1928, of this second edition. For years I looked in vain for a copy, and dealers kept trying to sell me a later and

[1]An/Essay/Towards the Present and Future/Peace/of/Europe/by the /Establishment of an European/Dyet, Parliament,/or Estates./[line]/ Beati Pacifici./[line]/Caedant Arma Togae./[line]/London Printed, and sold by E. Whitlock,/near Stationers Hall, 1696./

also cheap edition printed in Paris and authorized by Lawrence to meet the pirating of the first edition. The booksellers insisted that this was the second edition, and that I must have dreamed up an intermediate edition.

Then in London during the fall of 1950, I entered the magnetic field of the book I was seeking. I was in the bookshop of a man who had known Lawrence's Florentine publisher, that legendary figure named Pino Orioli who had died in Portugal during the war.

"I have some of his effects upstairs," the bookseller said. "Would you like to climb the stairs and see them?" Up and up and up we went, and I knew when we entered the flat on the topmost floor that treasure was there, for my device was ticking away at top speed. Just what it was, I did not know at once. The dealer opened a desk drawer. It was packed with letters.

"From Norman," he said, "all written to Pino."

"Norman Douglas?" I asked, and looked at one or two of them. "For sale?"

"It might be arranged—to you," was the reply. "Do you want to examine them all?"

"There's no need to," I said. "Simply wrap and ship. I know they aren't too expensive."

"Of course not—to you."

They weren't. But they were not the treasure.

"Do you need a first of *Lady Chatterley?*" the dealer asked, looking toward a bookcase in the corner.

"No, thanks," I said, and almost went on to ask about the superlatively rare second edition. I caught myself and dropped to my knees in front of the corner bookshelves. Now my device was really going. I ran my hands over the backs of the books. The light was not good enough to read their titles. My fingers closed on a single paper-bound volume. I knew I had found it. Yes, it was the second edition of the "Lady."

I managed somehow to do two things I rarely do: to keep quiet and to wear a poker face. Then I pulled out several other volumes, took the lot downstairs with us, and asked the bookseller to price them. When he came to the Lawrence, he sniffed.

"It's only a second edition," he said. "What do you want with it?"

"Oh just an idea," I said, bending over to untie and retie my shoe. "I thought it would make a good lending copy instead of my precious first."

"In that case," the dealer said, "I'll throw it in free with the others."

Once a person enters the magnetic field of books and feels their pull, he is lost for life. He will want to spend all of his waking hours living with books, at work and in leisure, in libraries and bookshops, and to go to sleep at night with books beside his bed where he can turn to them in the still hours of sleeplessness, and to begin each day with coffee and prose.

I think of my high school teacher of English from whom I first heard about Shakespeare. I was only fifteen then and a very naughty boy, a show-off and a tease, and I was assigned by her to a seat in the front row, right by her desk, where she could keep an eye (and sometimes a hand) on me. That teacher loved books. Although more than thirty years have passed, I can remember the loving way she held a book and the passion with which she read from it.

Years went by and more vivid memories crowded out the one of this teacher, whose name was Miss Bear. Then a few years ago an incident occurred in my library which resulted in national publicity. A student attempted to steal the copy of the *Bay Psalm Book* which had been loaned to us for exhibit by Doctor Rosenbach. It is the first book printed in English Colonial America, at Cambridge in 1640, and the last copy sold brought $151,000 at auction. Well, we caught the thief and recovered the book—thanks to God and a university policeman named Paul Frush—and a picture of me restoring the book to the exhibit case was flashed around the country by wirephoto.

Soon thereafter I received a letter from Delta, Colorado, written by my old teacher, expressing satisfaction that I had at last become a solid and bookish citizen, and asking me to visit her if I ever passed through Delta. I had to open my atlas to locate that Colorado town. It is about fifty miles up river from where the Gunnison and the Colorado meet at Grand Junction

and is at a lesser river junction, the confluence of the Gunnison and the Uncompahgre. It did not seem likely that I would ever go through Delta. And then my rancher brother-in-law moved from Wyoming to Colorado and took up a ranch on the Smith Fork of the Gunnison, about thirty miles above Delta.

We visited him last summer at this river ranch on the western slope of the Rockies, a peaceful place of timothy meadows, deep trout pools, and those fat ground-hogs known as "whistle pigs." On the way back to Los Angeles I stopped in Delta and asked the way to the home of Miss Bear. It was a cottage on the main street, fronted by lawn and flanked by flowers and shrubs. Alas, no one answered the bell—away on vacation, perhaps. I started back to the car, then quickly turned around and walked to the rear of the house.

There she was, a sturdy old lady picking roses. No mistaking Miss Bear; determination showed in everything she did, even picking roses. I walked up to her—probably a frightening sight in shirt by Sears and pants by Penney—looked her dead in the eye, western style, and asked, "Do you remember me?" She returned my look, same style, then backed off a bit, and her eyes were twinkling as she asked, "Would you be that Lawrence Powell?"

I threw my arms around her and kissed both cheeks, infinitely delighted that she could still see the boy in the middle-aged man. We went inside and she showed me her house and things. Every room had books in it, on shelves, tables, and even on the floor.

"I can't help it," she apologized. "They just come to me somehow. You know how it is, being a librarian. A *librarian!*" she said the word over again, and we both laughed at the thought that was in her mind.

"Where did it all begin?" I asked.

"Right here in Delta," she replied. "When I was a little girl in the public library—and I've loved books ever since, excessively, unreasonably, passionately, yes, and expensively! I should have been a librarian and gone around spending other people's money."

"You're not lonely here, all by yourself?" I asked, knowing what her answer would be.

"Of course not! I have all the best people who ever lived for company. I was reading Emerson at breakfast—let me get it; I want to read it to you."

She hurried off to the kitchen and back, fitted her glasses, opened the book, and read; and magically time contracted and I was back in class again, a high school sophomore in the bad boy's seat, hearing Miss Bear read aloud. And this is what she read:

"We owe to books those general benefits which come from high intellectual action. Thus, I think, we often owe to them the perception of immortality. They impart sympathetic activity to the moral power. Go with mean people and you think life is mean. Then read Plutarch, and the world is a proud place, peopled with men of positive quality, with heroes and demigods standing around us, who will not let us sleep."[2]

I left Miss Bear among her books and roses, practicing to the end of her life what she had preached to her pupils—that next to mother's milk, books are the best food.

I was in Phoenix, Arizona not long ago, having flown over from Los Angeles on a twofold mission; first to visit the Indian sites in the Salt River Valley, excavated in the 1880's by the first organized archaeological expedition to the Southwest; and second to examine the collections on Southwestern literature in the State Library. Between the library visit and a dinner engagement, I had a couple of free hours and I went in search of a bookshop, a secondhand bookshop where I might find a few items on the want-list I carry in my head.

Phoenix is not distinguished for its antiquarian bookshops; in fact, it was a New Mexican who said that Phoenix is merely the desert trying to be like California: a lot of stuccos and neons and not enough water. The university town of Tucson, a hundred-odd miles to the south, is a better hunting ground for bookmen. I did find one old bookshop in Phoenix, however, a couple of miles east of the Capitol, a barn-like place with a few naked light bulbs hanging on long cords, all but one of which were turned off. Two elderly men were seated at the rear of the store, one of them engaged in marking the price in a stack of books

[2]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Books," *Society and Solitude; Twelve Chapters* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1870), p. 170.

at his side, the other just sitting there watching him. Neither paid any attention to me.

"Mind if I put on a light?" I asked.

The bookmarker grunted, then said. "Go ahead, but as for me, I can find 'em better if it's not too bright."

And the other old gaffer piped up and said, "Those darned lights hurt my eyes too."

Was I dissuaded by this unusual kind of merchandising? No. Nothing dissuades a bookhunter, least of all bookseller resistance. I went about the gloomy shop, pulling on and off the dangling light chains, peering for the familiar and the unexpected. I found a Colorado River novel of a few years back, but which like many recent books has become scarcer than some a hundred years older. It is called *Crazy Weather,* by Charles McNichols, and is about a boy's adventures along the watercourse that divides Arizona and California in more ways than one—a sort of Huck Finn of the Colorado.[3]

In fact I found two copies, one marked one dollar, the other only fifty cents, and both were in good condition. I showed them to the bookseller and asked, "How come the difference in price?"

He took both copies and studied them carefully. He took his hat off and put it back on. He blew his nose. Then he said, "I see what you mean. At a dollar, one's too high, and at fifty cents one's too low. How about paying me seventy-five cents for a copy?"

The man interested me. Ignoring his humorous way of doing business, I looked closely at him while he went on marking books; then I asked, "Were you ever in Los Angeles?"

"Yes," he replied. "And so were you."

"But it's my home," I said.

"I know you," he said. "Spotted you when you came in the door."

"You talk like a detective," I said.

"We get some suspicious characters in here," was his reply.

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[3]Charles Longstreth McNichols, *Crazy Weather* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944).

"Now I know you," I said. "You used to sell secondhand novels to the Los Angeles Public Library."

"Back in the Depression," he said. "When you were working for Albert Read in the order department."

"It was my first library job," I recalled. "And it was good old Albert Read who first suggested that I leave this bookselling racket and become an honest librarian. He was a wonderful little sparrow of a man!"

"Sparrow hell! He was a vulture who fed on my profits!"

"He was only saving the city money," I said.

"Is he still doing it?"

"No," I said. "He retired ten years ago and went back into the trade, at Dawson's Bookshop. He couldn't keep away from books."

"Is he still there?" the old bookseller asked.

"No, he retired from Dawson's when he was seventy-five. That was five years ago. He died just last week."

The bookseller snorted and kept on marking the books in one pile and putting them in another.

"Read was a damn fool like the rest of us who haven't got sense enough to keep away from books. Take this shop for example. I never wanted to buy it. Came over on a scouting trip once and this old so-and-so sold it to me. And now all he does is sit here and watch me do the work."

The older gaffer cackled at this and slapped his thigh. I took my fifty-cent purchase and departed on more urgent business. A magnetic field, yes, but of rather low power.

The bookstack in a great library is a place of high magnetic power. I had a demonstration of this several years ago on my first visit to Yale. Before leaving Los Angeles I called on one of Yale's oldest living graduates, Dr. Henry R. Wagner of the class of 1884, who retired at sixty from mining engineering and then became an increasingly distinguished historian and bibliographer, until now at ninety-two, he is the Nestor of American bookmen. Wagner was a book collector from his college days.

"When you're in the Yale Library," he said to me, "be sure and see the collection on Irish Economics that I gave them fifty

years ago. Some bright young thing in the catalog department wanted to disperse the collection throughout the stacks by what was supposed to be the latest classification plan, but I raised so much hell that they kept it shelved intact. I want you to check up on them for me, will you, Larry?"

In the excitement of my first sight of the great Yale Library, I confess that I forgot all about old Wagner's charge. Jim Babb, the Librarian, had been hiking me for miles through those good gray Gothic acres of books, each succeeding sight of their treasures making me more covetous; and finally we took what Babb described as a short-cut back to his office, which led us across one of the top levels of the stacks. Only the main corridor was lit, and all the side ranges stood dark.

Babb went on ahead, unlocked the exit door, and waited for me to catch up. I started through the door; then I felt an irresistible urge to turn back several ranges and snap on the light switch. There I walked along the lighted range and looked at solid shelves of pamphlets, thousands upon thousands of them, all in uniform old bindings, really a noble sight of compressed power. Babb came back to see what had happened to me. He looked at the shelves, then exclaimed, "How did you know the Wagner collection was here?"

"I didn't," I said. "I mean I guess I did! I told the old man I'd look for it. I'd forgotten about it until just now when something told me it was here."

Babb looked skeptical, as if to say that he knew someone must have directed me to this range.

"I'm completely lost," I said. "I didn't even know I was thinking about the Wagner collection when we cut through here."

"Well," Babb said, "you can tell the old gentleman his collection is still the way he wants it."

Soon after arriving at Columbia this spring to teach in the library school, I had a magnetic experience with a single volume, a work which is one of my favorites of all the Southwest books I have ever read. It is Mary Austin's *Land of Journeys' Ending,* and it contains memorable chapters about Arizona and New Mexico, and one in particular about the national monument in the latter state known as Inscription Rock. Upon this great

buff-colored cliff of sandstone, passing travellers from the time of Don Juan de Oñate in 1605 have left their names inscribed in the rock, generally with the prefatory words *"Pasó por aquí."*

A switchback trail leads to the top of the cliff whereon the Zuñi Indians once dwelled. Mary Austin loved this remote place, and although she knew that federal law would prevent her from being buried there as she would have liked to be, she predicted that her ghost would at least haunt the Rock.

"You, of a hundred years from now," she wrote, "if when you visit the Rock, you see the cupped silken wings of the argemone burst and float apart when there is no wind; or if, when all around is still, a sudden stir in the short-leaved pines, or fresh eagle feathers blown upon the shrine, that will be I, making known in such fashion as I may the land's undying quality."[4]

I climbed the Rock last September, and although I did not see Mary Austin's ghost, I did sense most certainly what she calls the "land's undying quality."

The truly startling experience came when I dove into the Butler Library stacks and came up with Mary Austin's book in my hand. I charged it out, then carried it off like a dog with a bone to a far corner of the reading room, sat down, and opened it. There, resting lightly on the title page, lay a blue feather, an actual bird's feather, that of a mountain bluebird or a jay, pristine and iridescent, making known to this reader that book's undying quality. I was transfixed for a long moment, while the rustle of the reading room sounded softly. Then what did I do? The book was Columbia's, certainly, but just as surely that feather was mine, placed there who knows when or by whom, awaiting a reader who would know its meaning.

Books are indeed strong magnets, packed with the power to attract people and to change their courses. These have been some of my experiences in the magnetic fields, testimonials of love for my favorite places on earth—bookshops and libraries.

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[4]Mary Austin, *The Land of Journeys' Ending* (New York: The Century Co., 1924), p. 231.